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REVAMPING SPAIN'S FOREIGN POLICY

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After four decades of Franco's dictatorship, marked among many other things by the isolation in which it immersed the country, within only a few years Spain managed to find its own place on the international stage. The country entered years of intensive diplomatic activity in Europe, Latin America and the Mediterranean, which had already yielded its fruits in the period 1986-1996: during that decade, the foundations of the newly-found democratic republic's foreign policy were established, beginning with membership of NATO (1982) and the EU (1986), culminating in its key role in holding the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference in 1995.

The first twenty-five years of democracy in Spain were characterised by a highly active foreign policy, both in the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD, 1976-1982) and, later, the socialist (1982-1996) and conservative governments. However, during recent years and, very particularly, the last two legislatures, that foreign policy momentum has slowed down. Later years saw both a reduction in the interest of successive Spanish governments in international affairs and in the resources they allocated to it. The crisis that the whole of Europe and particularly Spain experienced over the last few years has in part determined this scenario. However, we should consider what came first when determining the

importance of foreign policy: budgetary constraints or lack of political will.

Spain is facing an electoral period that will be marked, according to the polls, by the end of a model that has dominated the entire democratic history of the country, a two-party system, giving way to a new multiparty model. Regardless of the result of the elections on 20 December, it seems clear that they will bring about the end of an era dominated by single-party governments based on large parliamentary majorities. These have allowed the development of a foreign policy with a considerable margin of autonomy, albeit with notable continuity for long periods, except in President Aznar's government.

One important question is whether the changes brought about by the results of the elections will have consequences for the next legislature's foreign policy. The analysis of the main elements of the electoral manifestos of the main political forces standing for election (PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos and Podemos) points at several key element. First of all, it is important to highlight the low political relevance that the four parties seem to attach to international affairs in their manifestos. Next Sunday's elections appear to be dominated by domestic issues (the economy, corruption, constitutional reform or the sover-

eighty issue in Catalonia, among others). Moreover, although there are differences in the approach of the “new” parties in comparison with the “traditional” ones, there is a significant degree of common ground, as all of them understand the general lines of Spanish foreign policy in a similar way. Therefore there appears to be a spirit of continuity in terms of European and Spanish foreign action for the next four years.

Is the negotiations ensue after the elections, it seems quite unlikely there will be a parliamentary majority with the ability or will to question the broad Europeanist and Atlantic consensus that has characterised Spanish foreign policy in recent decades. Therefore, the broad lines that will shape Spanish foreign action during the 11th legislature can be thought to be as follows: At the multilateral level, Spain's participation as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (1 January 2015 – 31 December 2016) is already proving fruitful today, and not only as a way of enhancing Spain's image in the global context. Although the country has been elected to the UNSC at a time of crisis, with multiple threats to international security and frequent impasse to resolve it at the United Nations' level, Spain's UNSC membership enables it to play a much more active role on the international stage.

As to the European Union, Spain must rejoin the European debate as a country that is emerging stronger from the crisis years, and with the aim of allowing Madrid to regain some lost legitimacy (caused by its slow decision-making in facing the crisis). The next year will be marked by the debate about the EU's strategy on the

world stage, and Spain must ensure that its interests are respected.

As regards Spain's foreign policy interests, it is essential to keep in mind the importance of the Southern neighbourhood over the next few years. The Mediterranean has traditionally been a hotspot in Spain's foreign policy, and it should be all the more so now, accounting for the important security challenges that arise from the region. We must bear in mind that, sadly, 2015 began and is ending in the same way: with terrorist attacks in Paris. The challenges this involves at the Euro-Mediterranean level, such as radicalisation, the conflicts in Libya and Syria, and migratory flows, require a clear approach from the newly-elected government.

Lastly, Latin America and the United States, and the changes at governmental level taking place in these countries, should not be ignored, also considering that Latin America has traditionally been an important vector in Spain's foreign policy.

From all of this we can conclude that Spain, the Mediterranean and Europe must confront important urgent challenges that cannot, and must not, wait. Perhaps the main challenge facing Spanish foreign policy is for whoever is in charge to recognize that it has to act upon the many international challenges facing it, in order to continue to be an important actor working for peace and progress.